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SUBJECT: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN THE CANADIAN PROVINCE OF MANITOBA
- ABORIGINAL POPULATIONS AFFECTED DISPROPORTIONATELY

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11. (U) This cable was prepared by APP Winnipeg.

12. (SBU) Summary: In the Canadian central plains, trafficking in persons is tied inextricably to the prostitution of aboriginal women and female children in the largest cities. A conference hosted by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs July 8-9 brought together stakeholders and experts - including University of British Columbia professor Benjamin Perrin, who was named as a TIP "hero" in this year's TIP report - to gauge the extent of the problem and develop a strategy to combat it. According to the evidence presented at the conference, there is a verifiable problem, but participants spent more time looking for someone to blame than at possible solutions. End summary.

Who is Trafficked and Why?

13. (U) Trafficking in Persons in Manitoba consists primarily of aboriginal women and children who are lured to the city from impoverished reservations in northern Manitoba with promises of a better life, a good job, and exciting lifestyle. Some find their own way to the city; others reportedly are transported by either gangs or individual pimps who seek to profit from the women once they get to the city. Others were born and raised in the city. In almost all cases, women make the initial trip voluntarily. Once they arrive in the city, they quickly find that their lack of education and cultural understanding disqualifies them for all but the most menial of jobs, and without any means of support or social network to help them. Prostitution offers quick money - reportedly up to C\$900 per day - and a seemingly more glamorous lifestyle. Many women and children are attracted to it initially. Some rationalize that they will only participate in the trade until "they have enough money to go home" or until "they get enough education to get something else." However, once they get involved in the sex trade, workers often become addicted to narcotics, and find that the only way they can support their habit is through continued participation in the sex trade.

14. (U) Conference participants heard that the subjugation of aboriginal women for prostitution has gone on since the time of European contact, and has gained momentum recently due to grinding poverty on reservations, glamorization of an urban, promiscuous lifestyle in popular culture, and easy and anonymous marketing on the Internet. According to statistics from the "Stop Sex with Kids" initiative of the Manitoba provincial government, 70 - 80 percent of the 400 children and youth involved in prostitution in the city of Winnipeg are aboriginal, 85 - 90 percent are female, and 72 percent were already in the care of child welfare agencies. There were some anecdotal remarks about aboriginal women and children being trafficked to other cities in Canada or even to the United States, but this does not appear to be widespread.

Where to from here?

15. (U) The conference featured many speakers who described the size and scope of the problem, and there were many personal testimonials from those who have escaped from the lifestyle about the terrible impact prostitution has on the women and children involved. Several speakers introduced controversial neo-Marxist analyses and historical perspectives of the situation. Some claimed that the problems of trafficking and prostitution are a result of the colonial legacy - one presenter referred to herself as an aboriginal woman living on occupied territory - as well as capitalism, poverty, Qwoman living on occupied territory - as well as capitalism, poverty, and cultural oppression by mainstream society. Police were often faulted for putting too much emphasis on picking up prostitutes rather than "johns" - the men who solicit sex from them. Federal and provincial justice agencies also faced harsh criticism for the lack of prosecutions and convictions in prostitution-related offenses. Police and justice officials acknowledged the frustration and agreed that they need to do better, within the laws that exist.

16. (U) Winnipeg Member of Parliament Joy Smith served as a co-chair of the conference; her private members' bill, C-268, was widely praised for promising longer sentences for those convicted of human trafficking offenses and to make it a crime in Canada to traffic minors. The Salvation Army runs reportedly the most effective series of programs designed to help girls get out of the sex trade, including one that takes girls to summer camps for a few days to get them away from the lifestyle and talk to them about alternatives to prostitution.

17. (SBU) 2009 State Department TIP "hero" Benjamin Perrin was a very active participant in the conference and was highly sought-after by the media after making controversial remarks on the first day. He gave the United States high marks for the TIP report, and innovative programs at the state and local levels such as the joint statement

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by Craigslist, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and forty state Attorneys General in which online auction sites agreed to obtain credit card information for each listing. He also claimed to have found 300 ads on Craigslist for women and children prostitutes in Winnipeg in the previous week and said that Winnipeg has by far the highest prevalence of overt acts of children being prostituted on the streets of any city he has ever seen. Perrin was featured on every media outlet in the region for two days.

18. (SBU) Comment: While part of the media ate up Perrin's statements, others questioned which contributors to human trafficking and prostitution the conference missed. The prevalence of aboriginal gangs in certain parts of the city and their role in human trafficking was not even mentioned. The collapse of traditional aboriginal society in Manitoba, where a large percentage of children are in custody of child welfare agencies, was only mentioned as another consequence of the colonial legacy and oppression. Aboriginal leaders appear only to have found human trafficking to be an issue this year, yet no one asked what they have done about an issue that has obviously decimating their community for years. Social workers and others in aid agencies - who made up a majority of the 100 participants in the conference - also did not come in for any scrutiny, despite more than 70 percent of prostituted youth being in care of child welfare agencies. That said, the conference was a good first start at getting the issue out in the open in Manitoba, and APP Winnipeg will stay in contact with organizers and conference participants to look at the full array of issues that buttress TIP in Manitoba.
BREESE